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Francis Levett, Jr.

Gina Cupstid
History 300
November 21, 1984

Abstract

This paper examines the life of Francis Levett, Jr. He is remembered for his contributions to the Florida government during the British colonial period, circa 1760-1780, and for the establishment of Julianston Plantation, McIntosh County, GA., which would become the Levett family legacy, lasting from 1787 until 1866.

The Julianton Plantation is located on a lovely peninsula on the Julianton River in McIntosh County, Ga. From 1787 until 1866, it belonged to Francis Levett, Jr. and his heirs. It was in the summer of 1984, while participating in an archaeological fieldschool, that I saw Julianton for the first time. This would be the beginning of a research project that is even now not nearly complete. The research project was born of an intense curiosity about not only the plantation itself, but of its previous owner as well. Who was this Francis Levett? The following report is an attempt to answer, in part, that question.

Arriving in Florida, in 1769, just seven years before the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War, at the age of 15, he helped his father, Francis Levett, Sr., establish the first of the two Julianton Plantations. This one was located on the St. John's River.¹ His father had been a member of the East Florida Society of London, a group of influential Britons, who met once a month to discuss the possibilities of establishing estates in East Florida. At their meeting on March 19, 1767, Dr. Andrew Turnbull, who had received a grant for East Florida property in June of 1766, gave a report on the colony. He must have been quite a salesman; on March 27, 1767, a large number of petitions for land were presented to the Privy Council. Among those petitioning were Francis Levett, Sr. and Patrick Tonyn, Levett's brother-in-law. Francis was issued an order for 10,000 acres, and Tonyn, 20,000 acres. The orders were issued on May 13, 1767.²

The orders issued were not grants. They were warrants for survey. The person to whom the order was issued had to find

someone to go to Florida, locate an extent of land equal to the amount listed in the order, and have it surveyed. After recording the survey with the governor of the province, at that time, James Grant, the governor would issue the grant.

Alexander Gray was the man commissioned by both Levett and Tonym to locate and survey their land. Richard Oswald, also a member of the East Florida Society, and corresponding with James Grant, wrote him in June of 1767, to advise him of Gray's intent. Oswald wrote Grant again in April of 1769 to introduce Levett, and noted that he was accustomed to the warm climate of Asia and Italy.³

It was these events whereby Francis Levett, Jr., found himself in East Florida in September, 1769. It should be noted that in view of events to come, the East Florida Society did not have the benefit of kind regards from the other North American colonies. They saw the Society and its operations in London as symbolizing the corruptions of the government from which they desired to separate.⁴

Francis and his father would participate in Florida government; his father was appointed judge in 1771, and took his seat on the royal council in the same year, and Francis would serve as provost marshall from 1774 to 1775 and again in 1778.⁵ Does this prove staunch loyalty to the British Crown? In Francis' case, I think not. There were others in the Florida government, whose loyalty would be questioned; Turnbull and Drayton, for example. To illustrate what I think may be, at the very least, toleration of the patriot cause, I'll use the affair of Jonathan Bryan. Bryan was from Georgia and had obtained a land lease from the Creek

Indians of Florida. Knowing there would be problems ahead, he had enlisted the support of William Drayton and Andrew Turnbull. They were to use their influence to push for confirmation of the grant; they didn't get the chance. Patrick Tonyn, governor of Florida at that time and Francis' uncle, learned of the scheme from Governor Wright of Georgia, and set about trying to get Bryan arrested. Tonyn sent the provost marshal, Levett, to obtain a writ from Chief Justice Drayton for Bryan's arrest. Drayton sent back word that a writ wouldn't work. Tonyn then sent for whatever it was that would work, Drayton replying he'd see Tonyn the next morning. Furious, Tonyn went to Drayton's house only to be told that Drayton had gone to bed. The next day, January 13, 1775, Drayton tried to dissuade Tonyn from having Bryan arrested, though to no avail. Levett was sent to arrest Bryan, warrant in hand. By design or by luck Bryan escaped to Georgia, having been warned by James Penman or a youth who saw Bryan heading for the house where Levett was playing backgammon. Tonyn would blame the escape on Drayton's delays; Drayton would blame the escape on on Levett's game of backgammon.⁶

Was Levett just playing by the rules or was he an active participant in this farce? That he had knowledge of the events from the onset, and that it took awhile to find him on January 13, suggests that he may have been playing more than backgammon, though keeping above suspicion because of the relation to Tonyn.

As supporting evidence, I refer you to Francis' will written in 1802. In it he would recommend to his son, John, that he have a knowledge of the Constitution and laws of the United States and Georgia, to better qualify him to take charge of the estate.⁷

This does not sound like a man who has disdain toward the American government. He did not, however, at any time, openly support the American government during the time he lived in Florida.

Francis left Florida in 1785, and made loyalist's claims⁸ in 1787. The last we see of Francis' father is in the 1783 Spanish census, Florida having been ceded back to Spain. A description of his father is given in the census and from this we learn that he has doubled his original 10,000 acres, he has three houses; one on Julian-ton Plantation, and two in St. Augustine. It also contains the rather interesting fact that he is availing of Spanish protection to retire. This suggests that he may have been in ill health, not able to make the trip back to England or that he was happy there and wished to stay.⁹ His father died sometime between the time the census was taken and 1785; Francis' loyalist claim stating loss of paternal estate to which he was co-heir.¹⁰

Francis had married while in Florida, and he and his wife, Charlotte, had a daughter, also named Charlotte, in 1783. His son John, was born in 1787. They would be the heirs to his estate, after his death on August 18, 1802.¹¹ Exactly how Francis obtained Julian-ton is not known. Possibilities include buying the property with the monies received from the claims' award; there is not a record of a deed. It could have been left to him, but by whom? There are references to Francis, Sr. having been a wealthy Georgia planter before going to Florida, though I have been unable to substantiate this. There is however reference to the name Harris in Francis Sr.'s will and there were Harris'

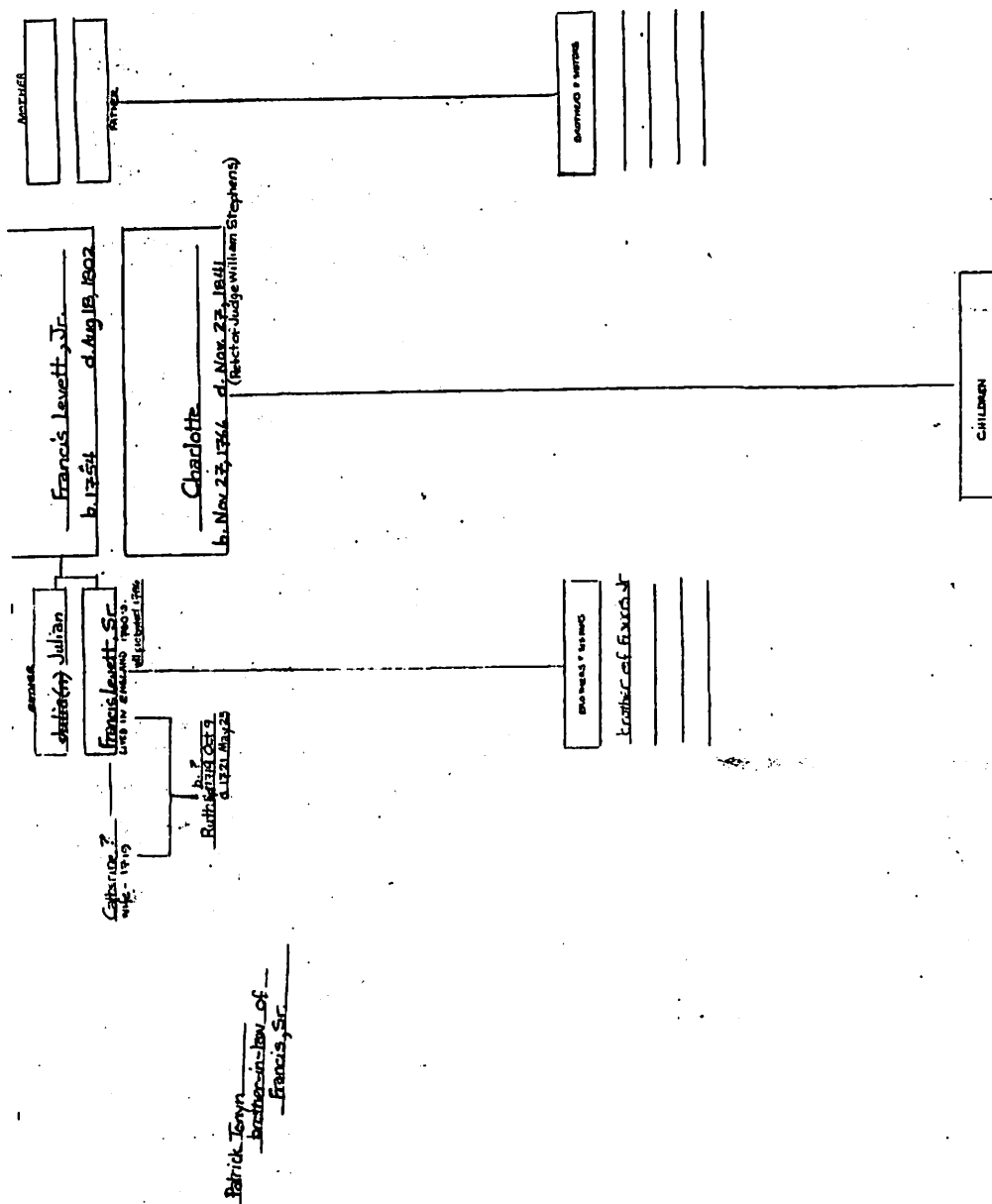
in the Georgia Julian-ton area. Further research will, it is hoped, clear this matter.

Regardless of how he obtained Julian-ton, he prospered there as a cotton and rice planter.¹² And not only there, he also had land on Isla(y) Island and in Effingham County and in the White Bluff District of Savannah.¹³

Francis and his son John were buried at Julian-ton. John died on October 7, 1808, leaving his wife, Christina Wright Levett and two daughters, Julia Mary Isabella and Charlotte. Francis' daughter, Charlotte, had married the Reverend Thomas Bennett in 1806 and in the course of the 11 years from 1813 to 1824 had 6 children. It was one of those six, William Holtham Bennett, that would, in 1866,¹⁴ sell Julian-ton Plantation to Edward W. DelaGal, thus ending the Levett association with Julian-ton. Francis' wife, Charlotte died on her birthday, November 27, in 1841. The daughter, Charlotte, died on June 18, 1854.¹⁵

Notes

1. Dr. George C. Rogers, editor. The Papers of Henry Laurens.
Vol. 6, p.577n. Hereafter cited as PHL.
2. Dr. George C. Rogers. "The East Florida Society of London"
Florida Historical Quarterly.
3. PHL. Rogers. Vol. 6, p.577n.
4. "The East Florida Society of London." p.495.
5. Charles Loch Mowat. East Florida as a British Province 1763-1784. pp. 163-165. Hereafter cited as EFBP.
6. EFBP. Mowat. p. 88-91.
7. Francis Levett. Will. Chatham County Courthouse. Probate Court.
Folio 27. Ll 441-494.
8. William Henry Siebert. Loyalists in East Florida, 1774-1785.
Vol. II pp. 228-237. Hereafter cited as LEF.
9. 1783 Spanish Census. St. Augustine Historical Society.
St. Augustine, Florida.
10. LEF. Siebert. p.228.
11. Francis Levett. Will. Chatham County Courthouse. Probate Court.
Folio 27. Ll 441-494.
12. Francis Levett. Estate Papers. Chatham County Courthouse.
Probate Court. Folio 27. Ll 441-494.
13. The Georgia Gazette. Thursday, August 26, 1790. p.1,c.1.
14. Deed. McIntosh. County Courthouse. Superior Court.
15. Death Certificate. General Register Office, Somerset House,
London. (Certified Copy of an Entry of Death.)
Charlotte(Levett)Stephens. Application no. 609687.
Charlotte(Levett)Bennett. Application no. 609688



1787
b. 1787
1787

Charlotte Julia Levett

b-1763
date, 1954 (71)
bride w/ husband + mother
Cathedral

(Christiana)
Christiana Wright
Juliana Mary Isabella Levett
Charlotte Levett

Rev Thomas Bennett d. Nov 22, 1829 (64)
Charlotte Julian died as infant b. 1815

Charlotte Julia died as infant b. 1819
John Levett b. 1819

Click the Julian # b. 1917

Charlottesville, Va. 6:11 PM
William Holtham Bennett b Dec. 25, 1924
to Julian Plomation later sold to Edward W. DeLoach
bought plantation on Occanee R. (Chatham Co GA)

bought plantation on Og
Francis Levett b. 1813

Eliza W. 1842

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Slivka, Gene to Gina Cupstid. November 5, 1984.

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<u>Book</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>Grantor</u>
2N	547	Catheryn Levett
2A	227	Charlotte Julia Levett
2L	281	Christina Levett
2H	556	"
20	247	"
20	651	"
S	74	Francis Levett (Sr.)
Y	418	"
20	247	John Levett (Estate)